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"WET" SLANDERS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN REFUTED

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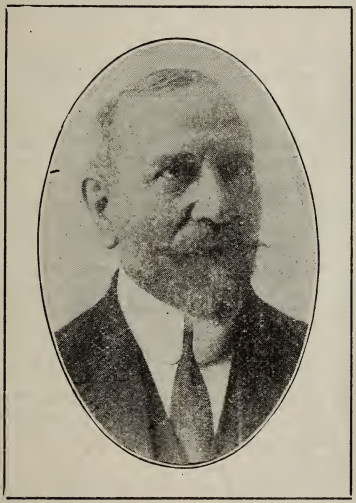

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"WET" SLANDERS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN REFUTED

PERHAPS the *lowest type of meanness* is the slander of a man who is no longer living to defend himself. One would have thought that of all the presidents of the United States the last to be maligned would be Abraham Lincoln, yet for many years *the liquor interests* in America have persistently circulated statements to the effect (1) that LINCOLN DRANK; (2) that LINCOLN WAS A SALOON-KEEPER; and (3) that LINCOLN OPPOSED PROHIBITION.

1. I suppose that none of the liquor people would have the hardihood to declare in any body of sober Americans that Abraham Lincoln was A LIAR; yet this is precisely what they do when stating that he used any intoxicating liquor as a beverage. What are *Lincoln's own utterances* concerning the matter?

Lincoln, as is well known, was six feet four inches tall, and a giant in strength. A friend of his, William G. Greene, wagered that Lincoln could lift a forty-gallon cask of whisky high enough to drink out of the bung-hole. Lincoln squatted down and lifted the cask to his knees, rolling it over till his mouth was opposite the bung. His friend cried out "I have won my bet, but that is the first dram of whisky I ever saw you swallow, Abe." Lincoln spurted the liquor out of his mouth and replied "*And I haven't swallowed that, you see.*" (Whitney, "Life of Lincoln," p. 85.)

The Hon. Shelby M. Cullom (Governor and United States Senator) of Springfield, Ill., has testified (Chicago "Record-Herald," March 16, 1908) that when he and other members of a committee of Springfield citizens called at Lincoln's home, after he had been nominated for President, to discuss arrangements for receiv-

ing the committee on notification, Lincoln said: "*Boys, I never had a drop of liquor in my whole life, and I don't want to begin now.*" Dr. J. G. Holland, in his "Life of Lincoln" (1866, pp. 228-229) states that *Lincoln even returned sundry hampers of liquors and wines* which certain friends, *knowing Lincoln's abstinent habits*, had sent for the notification meeting.

Carpenter, the painter of the picture of Lincoln and his Cabinet, relates in "Six Months in the White House," p. 125, that after the notification ceremony, tumblers and a large pitcher were placed upon the center table. Lincoln then arose and addressed the company as follows: "Gentlemen, we must pledge our mutual healths in the most healthy beverage which God has given to men. IT IS THE ONLY BEVERAGE I HAVE EVER USED, or allowed in my family, and I cannot consistently depart from it on the present occasion. It is *pure Adam's ale* from the spring." He then pledged the company in a *glass of water*, and all the guests followed his example, while admiring his consistency.

Frederick Trevor Hill states ("Lincoln the Lawyer," p. 33) that once Stephen A. Douglas chaffed Lincoln about his abstinence from intoxicants and asked sneeringly "What! Are you a temperance man?" Lincoln replied: "No, I'm not a temperance man, but I'm temperate in this—*I DON'T DRINK.*"

On the occasion of Lincoln's visit to General Grant at City Point (1865), when Lincoln complained of having been shaken up on the steamboat by which he had traveled, a staff officer suggested that he send for a bottle of champagne for the President. Lincoln stopped him with the remark, "No, no my young friend. I've seen many a man seasick ashore from drinking that very article."

If any further testimony to Lincoln's abstinence were needed it is found in *the promise he made to his mother* only a few days before her death, at which time Lincoln was not quite eight years old. In 1847, when he was a mem-

ber of Congress, a fellow member remonstrated with him for declining to taste some rare wines which their common host had provided. Lincoln replied that he meant no disrespect to his host, but that he had made *a solemn promise to his mother* that he would never use as a beverage anything that was intoxicating and that he considered that pledge as binding now as it was the day he gave it. It was suggested to him that the promise was made in childhood and that he was now in mature manhood, enviroined by different conditions. He replied "But a promise made is a promise forever, and when made to a mother is doubly binding."

As I have said above, *EITHER THE LIQUOR PEOPLE MUST ACCEPT LINCOLN'S OWN STATEMENTS ON THIS MATTER OR BRAND HIM A LIAR.*

2. The slander which the liquor people and their friends publish with the greatest gusto is the one which *connects Lincoln with the saloon business.* As I write, I have before me a California paper which, under the heading "ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN THE SALOON BUSINESS," prints a cut of "Abraham Lincoln's Saloon in 1833" together with a copy of the license under which, it is alleged, Lincoln sold liquor. The text of the article contains the following passage: "It cannot longer be said that Lincoln was a dry man, and that he was against the saloons. It has recently come out that Lincoln, in 1833, *was in the saloon business.*

In 1908 the German-American Alliance, a pro-liquor organization, published a facsimile of the license, the opening words of which read "ORDERED, That William F. Berry, in the name of Berry and Lincoln, have a license to keep a tavern in New Salem, to continue twelve months from this date." The bond attached to the license purported to be signed by Abraham Lincoln, William F. Berry, and Bowling Greene. These publications caused great glee in the liquor camp, and copies of the Lincoln saloon license, and bond were publicly displayed in many a liquor-shop. NOW WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

Lincoln and Berry, the latter a son of a Presbyterian minister, but unfortunately a heavy drinker, bought the groceries of the village and consolidated them; and having no money, gave their notes for $1,500. When Berry suggested that, on the principle that honey catches flies, a barrel of whisky would attract customers, *Lincoln opposed this innovation* (see A. T. Rice, "Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln," etc., New York, 1909). Miss Ida M. Tarbell, than whom there is no more impartial and veracious writer among American authors, wrote her "Life of Lincoln" in 1900. She saw the original bond in the official records and declared that *LINCOLN'S NAME WAS NOT ATTACHED TO IT BY HIS OWN HAND* ("Life of Abraham Lincoln," New York, 1900, vol. i, p. 96); and the publication of the facsimile of the bond fully corroborated Miss Tarbell's statement. Lincoln was absent for several months in the Black Hawk War; and on his return he found that his partner had sold all the goods but had failed to pay the debts, leaving Lincoln responsible for $1,100. He declared that that debt was the greatest obstacle he had ever met. He however, went to his creditors and told them he would give them all the money he could spare as soon as he could earn some; and, as a matter of fact, the whole of the notes, together with interest, were finally paid while Lincoln was a member of Congress (see Rice, p. 4). When Lincoln was saddled with these debts he was a young man of twenty-four.

Then there is *LINCOLN'S OWN STATEMENT* about the matter. In the first of the seven joint debates between Stephen A. Douglas and Lincoln, which took place at Ottawa, Ill., Aug. 21, 1858, Douglas banteringly alluded to Lincoln as he was when he (Douglas) first became acquainted with him and said among other things: "I was a school-teacher in the town of Winchester, and he a flourishing grocery-keeper in the town of Salem." Now it should be remembered that in those times "*grocery*" *was synonymous with* "*groggery*." Lincoln's reply was as follows:

"The Judge [Douglas] is wofully at fault about his early friend Lincoln being a 'grocery keeper.' I don't know as it would be a great sin if I had been; *but he is mistaken. Lincoln never kept a grocery anywhere in the world.*" The foregoing is copied from the published official volume of the speeches, the proofs of which were revised by Lincoln and Douglas. Congressman Robert Hitt of Illinois was Lincoln's official stenographer.

Nicolay and Hay, in "Abraham Lincoln—A History," say (vol. i, p. 111) that *the tavern for which the license was granted was never opened,* as Lincoln and Berry about this time sold out to a pair of vagrant brothers named Trent, who paid for the concern in notes that proved worthless.

The statement that "Lincoln was in the saloon business," implying that he was voluntarily a seller of liquor, is a *BASE SLANDER*: in support of it the liquor interests, though they still continue to repeat it, are unable to produce any reliable evidence whatever.

3. Recently the pro-liquorites have been very active in proclaiming to the world that LINCOLN WAS OPPOSED TO PROHIBITION. For instance, Mr. Robert D. Wardell, secretary of the National Association Against the Prohibition Amendment, writing in the Detroit "Free Press" of March 3, 1922, says:

Permit me to set G. L. Conley right regarding the authenticity of Abraham Lincoln's statement on prohibition. It was made in a speech in opposition to the state-wide prohibition bill introduced in the Illinois state legislature, of which he was a member, in 1840. The bill was defeated in the House by a vote of 78 to 8. These are Lincoln's actual words:

"Prohibition will work a great injury to the cause of temperance. It is a species of intemperance within itself, for it goes beyond the bounds of reason, in that it attempts to control a man's appetite by legislation and makes a crime out of things that are not crimes. A prohibition law strikes a blow at the very principles on which our government was founded. I have always been found laboring to protect the weaker from the stronger and I can never give my consent to such a law as you propose to enact."

Now on the face of it this seems quite convincing; but, as the old saying goes, "one side

is good until the other is told." This is what Duncan C. Milner says in "Lincoln and Liquor" (New York, 1920, pp. 73-74):

The liquor advocates have given extensive publicity to Lincoln's vote in the Illinois legislature of 1840 on "An Act to regulate tavern and grocery licenses." In the House Journal of December 19, 1840, it is recorded that Mr. Murphy, of Chicago, moved to strike out all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

"That after the passage of this act no person shall be licensed to sell vinous or spirituous liquors in this State and that any person who violates this act by selling such liquors shall be fined in the sum of one thousand dollars, to be recovered before any court having competent jurisdiction."

It was an apparent effort by a friend of the liquor business to make the bill an object of ridicule. *Lincoln moved to lay the Murphy amendment on the table,* and this was carried by a vote of seventy-five Yeas to eight Nays. This action has been widely paraded as evidence that Mr. Lincoln voted against Prohibition.

Mr. Wardell seems to have *forgotten,* if he ever knew, that this alleged statement by Lincoln was printed in 1887 in Atlanta, Georgia, during an exciting campaign to close the saloons. Handbills were headed in large letters:

FOR LIBERTY! ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S PROCLAMATION

Underneath was a picture of a negro kissing Lincoln's hand which was striking off the negro's shackles. Then followed the quotation Mr. Wardell attributes to the Great Emancipator. Mr. Wardell does not seem to be aware that a copy of this handbill was sent to Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln's biographers, and that both of them declared they were unable to trace the quotation in any of Lincoln's letters, speeches, or documents. Does he know that the president of the Model License League admitted that he could not tell where the original of the quotation could be found and that *prominent liquor journals have failed, on challenge, to produce* any verification whatever of the alleged utterance?

Mr. Wardell, as mentioned above, says that this statement of Lincoln's was made "in a speech in opposition to the state-wide Prohibition bill introduced in the Illinois state legis-

lature, of which he was a member, in 1840." Well, if this were so, there would be a record of it in the Journal of the Illinois House of Representatives. I, accordingly, wrote to the Clerk of the House, asking him if he would be good enough to have the Journal searched for the speech referred to by Mr. Wardell. I have received the following reply through the Illinois State Historical Library:

ILLINOIS STATE HISTORICAL LIBRARY
SPRINGFIELD

June 30, 1922.

Dr. Albert Porter,
Westerville, Ohio.

Dear Sir:

Your letter addressed to the Clerk of the House of Representatives was by him referred to this Department for reply. I beg to advise we can find no record of the quotation "prohibition will work a great injury, etc." in any of the newspapers or published speeches of Abraham Lincoln. In the House Journal of 1839-40 there is a mere record of the vote on the Murphy bill, NO SPEECHES BEING GIVEN, nor is there anything published in the Springfield papers of that date.

The Anti-Saloon League and others have had representatives go over the files in this office and also the House Journals of that date, but as above stated in none of the material in this Library that we have gone over do we find any record of this quotation.

Yours very truly,
(Signed) (Miss) GEORGIA L. OSBORNE,
Assistant Librarian, Illinois State Historical Library.

IF, after reading this letter, Mr. Wardell and his friends continue to attribute the statement in question to Lincoln, they will be guilty of *deliberate misrepresentation.*

Mr. Wardell quotes what he terms "another anti-prohibition statement by Lincoln:"

Too much denunciation against dram sellers and dram drinkers is indulged in. It is impolitic, because it is not in the nature of man to be driven to anything; still less to be driven about that which is exclusively his own business; and least of all, when he is told, not in the accents of entreaty or persuasion, diffidently addressed by erring men to an erring brother, but in the thundering tones of anathema and denunciation.

He says it is to be found in Lincoln's address before the Springfield Temperance Society, Feb 22, 1842.

This is a fine example of Mr. Wardell's dis-

ingenuousness. He has given the truth, but *not the whole truth.* He might as well, in quoting the scriptural passage "Let him that stole steal no more," stop after the word "steal." Lincoln was talking about the new class of temperance champions, and he endeavored to show what he considered to be *the unwisdom of the tactics of the old-school reformers.* What he did say was this (the italics show misquotations):

But, had the old-school champions themselves been of the most wise selecting, was their system of tactics the most judicious? It seems to me it was not. Too much denunciation against dram-sellers and dram-drinkers *was* indulged in. *This, I think, was both impolitic and unjust.* It *was* impolitic, because it is not *much* in the nature of man to be driven to anything; still less to be driven about that which is exclusively his own business; and least of all, *where such driving is to be submitted to, at the expense of pecuniary interest, or burning appetite. When the dram-seller and drinker were incessantly told,* not in the accents of entreaty *and* persuasion, diffidently addressed by erring man to an erring brother, but in the thundering tones of anathema and denunciation with which the lordly judge often groups together all the crimes of the felon's life, and thrusts them in his face just ere he passes sentence of death upon him, that they were the authors of all the vice and misery and crime in the land; that they were the manufacturers and material of all the thieves and robbers and murderers that infest the earth; that their houses were the workshops of the devil; and that their persons should be shunned by all the good and virtuous, as moral pestilences—I say, when they are told all this, and in this way, it is not wonderful that they were slow, very slow, to acknowledge the truth of such denunciations, and to join the ranks of their denouncers, in a hue and cry against themselves.

To have expected them to do otherwise than they did—to have expected them not to meet denunciation with denunciation, crimination with crimination, and anathema with anathema—was to expect a reversal of human nature, which is God's decree and can never be reversed.

When the conduct of men is designed to be influenced, persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion, should ever be adopted. It is an old and a true maxim, "that a drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall." So with men. If you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend.

Mr. Wardell says that "Lincoln may have been an abstainer, but he never was for prohibition * * * Could he have lived longer, were

he alive today, prohibition as we have it would not exist." Really! Has Mr. Wardell read the following, which occurs *in the same address* which he has *misquoted?*

Whether or not the world would be vastly benefited by a total and final banishment from it of all intoxicating drinks, seems to me *not now an open question. Three-fourths of mankind confess the affirmative with their tongues, and, I believe, all the rest acknowledge it in their hearts.*

On the last day of his life Lincoln said to Mr. J. B. Merwin, who was associated with him in a confidential capacity:

Merwin, we have cleaned up a colossal job. Slavery is abolished. *After reconstruction the next great question will be the overthrow and suppression of the legalized liquor traffic,* and you know that my head and my heart, my hand and my purse will go into the contest for victory. In 1842, less than a quarter of a century ago, I predicted that the day would come when there would be *neither a slave nor a drunkard* in the land. I have lived to see one prediction fulfilled. I hope to live to see the other realized.

Mr. Wardell does not like this quotation. He says:

"The reputed statement never passed Lincoln's lips. It was manufactured, I am told, in the *offices of the Anti-Saloon League at Westerville, Ohio.* Lincoln, master of English and expression, never would have employed the flamboyant manner Merwin quotes him in."

So far from there being anything flamboyant in the statement, the simple language employed in it seems to be quite in harmony with Lincoln's usual style. Mr. Wardell only shows the weakness of his case by charging the Anti-Saloon League with fabrication of this passage.

TO SUGGEST, AS THE LIQUOR INTERESTS DO, THAT LINCOLN FAVORED THE TRAFFIC IN INTOXICATING BEVERAGES, IN ANY FORM IS TO UTTER A BASE SLANDER OF THE MARTYR PRESIDENT. His whole life furnishes overwhelming testimony to his consistent attitude on the alcohol question. In 1853 he was one of those who signed a request that a lecture on "The Bottle—Its Evils and the Remedy," delivered at Springfield, Ill., by the Rev. James Smith, should be printed and put

into general circulation. This lecture contained the following passage:

> The liquor traffic is a cancer in society, eating out its vitals and threatening destruction; and all attempts to regulate it will not only prove abortive, but aggravate the evil. No, there must be no more attempts to regulate the cancer: it must be eradicated; not a root must be left behind, for, until this be done, all classes must continue exposed to become the victims of strong drink. . . . The most effectual remedy would be the passage of a law altogether abolishing the liquor traffic, except for mechanical, chemical, medicinal, and sacramental purposes, and so framed that no principle of the Constitution of the State or of the United States should be violated.

In 1861 Lincoln signed the Act of Congress providing:

> That it shall *not be lawful* for any person in the District of Columbia to *sell, give, or administer* to any soldier or volunteer in the service of the United States, or any person wearing the uniform of such soldier or volunteer, *any spirituous liquor or intoxicating drink,* etc.

In 1862 he signed another Act, which provided:

> That from and after the 1st day of September, 1862, the *spirit ration* in the navy of the United States *shall forever cease,* and thereafter no distilled spirituous liquors shall be admitted on board of vessels of war except as medical stores, etc.

The same year, when, yielding to the entreaties of the Secretary of the Treasury (Hon. S. P. Chase), he signed the Internal Revenue Bill, he said: "I would rather *lose my right hand* than to sign a document that will tend to perpetuate the liquor traffic; and as soon as the exigencies pass away *I will turn my whole attention to the repeal of that document.*

On Sept. 29, 1863, in replying to a deputation that waited upon him, he said: "When I was a young man—long ago, before the Sons of Temperance as an organization had an existence, I in an humble way *made temperance speeches;* and I think I may say that I have never by my example belied what I then said."

Mr. James B. Merwin, founder of "The American Journal of Education," and one who had the entire confidence of Lincoln, relates that Lincoln said: "The saloon has proved itself to be the greatest foe, the most blighting curse

of our modern civilization, and *this is why I am a practical prohibitionist.*" (Milner, p. 83.)

The whole career of Lincoln presents no evidence whatsoever that he favored the liquor traffic; and those are poor patriots who seek support for their cause in *BASE SLANDERS* of the Great Emancipator, who sought to rid America of *liquor slavery* as well as of human slavery.

Since the foregoing was written, unexpected and conclusive evidence of the falsity of Mr. Wardell's statement, that Lincoln said "Prohibition will work a great injury," etc., has come to light. The Rev. Duncan Milner, Associate minister of Ravenswood Presbyterian Church, Chicago, writing to Editor Samuel J. Fickel of "The American Issue" under date of July 4, 1922, says that not long ago he met Colonel Sam W. Small, the noted editor, evangelist, and lecturer, and asked him if he could not furnish information relating to the speech attributed to Lincoln. Colonel Small thereupon made an affidavit to the effect that Colonel John B. Goodwin, who had been the director of the Anti-prohibition forces at Atlanta, Ga., in 1887, had told him that HE (COLONEL GOODWIN) HIMSELF DEVISED THE CIRCULAR IN QUESTION, and composed the alleged words of Lincoln, so as to attract the adhesion of the colored votes, and had done so because to win them was the forlorn hope of the "wets," the county at the time being under a Prohibition law. The affidavit, signed by Sam W. Small, was made before Notary Allan B. Prosire in the County of Arlington, Va., June 6, 1922.

Goodwin was mayor of Atlanta in 1883-84 and again in 1893-94. He held high office in Odd Fellowship for more than forty years, and from May, 1905, until his death was Grand Secretary of the Sovereign Grand Ladge, with headquarters at Baltimore, Md.

NOTE—Write for supply to distribute. Makes fine letter enclosures or to wrap in with packages. Per 100, $2.40; per 500, $7.20; per 1,000, $9.60. Order from Lincoln-Lee Legion, Westerville, Ohio.

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